

Life of John Foster,

in common with the repulsive gloom of bigotry and fanaticism. His thinking is rugged, massive, and original; and at times, when his great imagination rouses itself from sleep, a splendour of illustration breaks over his page that startles the reader, both by its beauty and its suggestiveness."

Of the *Essays*, in a series of letters, of which two are here reprinted, there remains little to be said. They were first published, as we have told, in 1805, while Foster was officiating as pastor of the Baptist chapel at Frome. Sir James Mackintosh did not hesitate to affirm that they showed their author to be "one of the most profound and eloquent writers that England has produced."* They have been remarkably popular, especially among the more thoughtful of the community, and have gone through upwards of twenty editions.

"Multitudes of young persons," remarks a writer in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "have regarded as a bright era in their mental history the hour when this volume first came into their hands, and have never ceased to rejoice in its stimulating and elevating influence on their faculties. It has been to them a day spring, revealing a world of living beauty and wonders where all was before involved in death-like torpor and gloom. Its intellectual power and deep-toned eloquence have dissolved in many minds the unhappy and absurd association of piety with mental weakness and vulgarity; while, on the other hand, it has released from their trammels not a few who had been wont to regard general literature and freedom of thought as the exclusive property of the profane. The last of the four essays, *On Some of the Causes by which Evangelical Religion has been rendered unacceptable to Persons of Cultivated Taste*, has probably contributed more than anything else to that reformation in style which is perceptible in our modern religious literature."

To the present edition we have added a few foot-notes illustrative of the various allusions made by the author, and these, it is hoped, will be found serviceable and interesting,

J. M,